

How Are Presidents Elected?

By D. A. Sharpe

Once every four years (Leap years) is a national political convention season, whereby each of the primarily major parties (Democrats and Republicans) determine who will be their candidates in the November national general elections for the office of President and Vice President. Many people may not realize the various ways such a nomination process can happen. Presidential General Elections in our future are 2020, 2024, 2028, etc.



Each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and a small handful of U.S. Territories, all send a quota of delegates (mainly based on population) to the respective National Conventions of a Political Party.

Republicans have five Territories, and the Democratic Party has five slightly different territories. These delegates are determined when YOU participate in the Primary Election process of your state. This is done in several different ways among these states, territories and in DC (jurisdictions).

Primaries among these jurisdictions have two basic methods to vote: Registered Voters cast votes at a public election polling place, or Registered Voters attend a county caucus (convention) to vote. There are 22 states out of the 56 jurisdictions that hold primary caucuses in counties. All Primary Elections take place anywhere from February to May, as determined by state law.

Primaries among these jurisdictions have three different criteria to determine WHO can vote in the election poll or in a county caucus. Here are the three kinds of ways:

1. **An open primary** jurisdiction means any registered voter of that state may choose in whichever political party primary election he or she wishes. When you register to vote in those jurisdictions, you are not asked with which political party do you identify (Democrat, Republican, or independent). That's the way it is in Texas. The only way you ever reveal your political party identity is at the voter poll. After your voter registration is validated you to vote in that election, you tell the election clerks which party ballot you wish to use. You can vote for candidates only on one party's ballot. You can't vote for President on one party's ballot, and for other candidates on another party's ballot.

2. **A semi-open primary** jurisdiction is a situation where in that jurisdiction, you must declare a party identification (Democrat or Republican) or be independent when you register to vote. In most states using this method, you must be a registered voter a month or more before a primary election. Semi-open means that only the registered voters

for that party may vote using that party's ballot, AND any independent registered voters may choose one party's ballot in a particular primary election. The Independent voter may not vote in more than one party's primary election. This is true both for election poll voting or county caucus voting.

3. A closed primary jurisdiction is one in which only the previously registered voters of that political party may vote in that party's ballot or in that party's caucus. No other registered voters may participate in that party's primary.

County Conventions: Each state holding elections have county conventions, usually the evening of the election day. Any registered voter who cast a vote in that Party's Primary Election may attend that county convention. Those conventions primarily elected among themselves those who will represent that county at that Party's State Convention.

Representation generally is determined by population of the county, and is set by state or Party regulation. They also may vote to send resolutions to their Party's Convention, which are expressions of advocacy for one issue or another. In states that hold only Party Caucuses, this also is generally what they do.

The respective jurisdictions (counties) tally votes when they conduct State Political Conventions in the early summer. At the State Convention, various delegates at those conventions run for election to determine WHO gets to represent the state's qualified delegate count at the national convention. In Texas, we have 3 delegates and 3 alternate delegates elected for each of the 31 state senatorial districts, plus a handful of uncommitted Republican elected officials. The Democratic party in Texas has more uncommitted delegates. Each National Party has its own rules about the numbers of delegates qualified to represent it at its Party's National Convention.

It didn't happen often, but it's possible when a multiple number of candidates exist for the

Presidency, and no one candidate acquires the needed majority before the National Convention of that Political Party, several rounds of votes will take place until one candidate achieves a majority delegate vote. In the Republican Party, for example, that majority threshold is 1,237 delegates. For the Democratic Party, it's 2,381 Delegate votes. It is unusual for multiple rounds of votes to be needed at a national convention.

The rules say that all the delegates must cast the vote for the presidential candidate who earned delegate votes in their state's primary in the first round of voting. In the second round of voting, if no majority is reached the first time, most delegates are freed from having to vote what they did the first time. In a handful of states, its delegates are also bound to vote the same way in each of the first two rounds, then they are free to change their votes, if subsequent votes take place.

Details in table form for all jurisdictions of both parties are displayed at:

https://ballotpedia.org/Types_of_delegates

What are the best reasons for the legislators of a state to legislate a specified voter registration process and whether to have all-day voter polls operating, versus a central county location for a caucus (convention) of registered voters?

First, I think voting at poll locations, available all day (plus the two-week early voting opportunity) is the best way to include the most people in voter participation. This is how we do it in Texas! The negative for having a county caucus, convening only in the evening, reduces the number of registered voters who to attend, versus the voting poll method.

The reason some support the caucus idea is to keep the less-serious voters from having a say in the primary election process. It keeps out the riff-raff!

My advocacy is that the more voters being able to participate, as we do in Texas, the fairer and more accurate is validation of the primary election process.

Should voter registration be open, semi-open or closed? The open method we have in Texas motivates more people, I feel, to take voting action on primary election day. Had it been semi-open registration or closed registration, that takes away the opportunity for voters to change their minds about in which political party they now wish to participate.

Sometimes, the voter registration deadline is far enough ahead of a primary election that some voters may not have realized their sentiments were changing, and they wished to vote in the other party's primary.

With these explanations, I hope most of the readers will appreciate the way we do it in Texas An open voter registration and open primary elections at public election polls, with availability of early voting. This is how the political parties determine who will be their candidates on the National General Election.

That election is the first Tuesday in November, following the first Monday.

In today's competitive political world, it's easy to perceive that both these political parties (and the few small parties) view the opposing party or parties as grossly wrong and representative of negative values. The truth probably is that each Democrat and each Republican believes they are advocating for the best good for all the people. It's just that each have differing views about how best that good is accomplished.

It is legal for a third party to exist in the United States (or even more), but no third-party effort in the past couple of centuries has been successful. The 1992 Presidential General Election is the only Presidential election that represented a significant impact by a third party or an independent candidate. The incumbent President was George H. W. Bush, running for his second term in office as a Republican Party candidate. The challengers were the Democratic

Party candidate, Bill Clinton, and independent candidate H. Ross Perot.

In the 1992 Presidential Election, Bill Clinton won that election with 43% of the vote, but with 370 electoral college votes (only need 270 electoral college votes to win). The one-term incumbent George H. W. Bush received only 37% of the vote, along with only 168 electoral college votes. H. Ross Perot received 19% of the vote, and no electoral votes. The remaining 1% were various write-in candidates, etc.

The impact that Mr. Perot had was that probably the great majority of his votes were from voters of the more conservative views that would have voted for the Republican candidate, if Mr. Perot had not been in the race. That would have given the incumbent Republican President Bush a 55+% of the votes, and most likely enough electoral college votes to have won a second term. Mr. Perot became the probable reason Mr. Bush did not serve a second Presidential term.

It is possible in the Electoral College to win the election with 270 or more Electoral College votes, yet not achieve a majority percent of the popular vote.

The Presidential election of 1860 pitted Abraham Lincoln, John C. Breckenridge John Bell and Stephen A. Douglas. The issues surrounded those which led up to the War Between the States (known generally as the Civil War). Lincoln won with 180 electoral votes, versus 72 electoral votes for Breckenridge, 39 electoral votes for Bell and 12 electoral votes for Douglas. However, Lincoln won only 39.8% of the popular vote, whereas Breckenridge won 18.1%, Bell won 12.6% and Douglas won 29.5%

So, the U.S. President is elected after going through all the process outlined in this document. My hope is that it helps voters to understand how that works.

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